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ABSTRACT

This paper explores some aspects of building and fostering strong group dynamics to enhance expedition behavior and ultimately, successful wilderness group experiences. It attempts to reflect the needs of both large-scale expeditions and educational and camp groups traveling through wilderness, and includes various activities to allow for direct learning experiences. The foundation of expeditions is social atmosphere. As a group travels through wilderness and partakes in new experiences, its members will also travel the human dimension of the journey, learning and experiencing ideas and emotions through one another. The quality of this social dimension is pivotal upon a healthy attitude. Enhancing a healthy attitude involves recognizing common sources of conflict among people in wilderness groups, including lack of respect; lack of flexibility; poor food; unbalanced chores; different objectives; different energy levels; different attitudes; stressors (such as bad weather); and an out-of-sync group member. The best way to combat these sources of conflict is to start before the expedition departs, by nurturing an environment where people feel free to express themselves. Included is an outline with suggestions for fostering strong group dynamics on wilderness trips, emphasizing pretrip objectives, route planning, working with group members, possible stressors, and overall excellent trip behavior. (Author/TSP)

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Human Dimensions of Expeditions: Deeply Rooted, Branching Out

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ABSTRACT

The human dimensions of expeditions are an entanglement of roots that can bind group members together and allow them to branch out and intensify the benefits of wilderness travel. This presentation explores some of the aspects of building and fostering strong group dynamics to enhance excellent expedition behaviour and ultimately successful wilderness group experiences. It attempts to reflect the needs of both large-scale expeditions and educational and camp groups travelling through wilderness, and includes various activities to allow for direct learning experiences.

Successful wilderness journeys are contingent upon the human dimensions of the group, for outstanding expedition behaviour is the heart and soul of meaningful expeditions. The human dimensions of expeditions are an entanglement of roots that can bind group members together and allow them to branch out to discover and realize the tangible and the often more potent intangible benefits of group wilderness travel. Many expeditions conduct meticulous logistical planning but fail to grasp or appreciate the complex, dynamic, and critical aspects of humans partaking in group wilderness travel. Frequently, many participants of wilderness journeys are less skilled or experienced in fostering strong group dynamics and subsequently enter the field simply hoping that "everyone will get along." Unfortunately this approach often fails, leaving expedition members wondering "What went wrong?" Much of this disappointment can

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be avoided by devoting as much attention to the human dimensions of wilderness trip planning as to the more obvious objective logistical details.

A key portion of the human dimensions of wilderness trips is that of expedition behaviour, the way in which group members' behaviour affects others on the trip. The goal of excellent expedition behaviour is to consistently contribute to the group's goals, to work toward fostering respect for one another and to facilitate an optional working and growing environment for all participants. Groups who value meaningful wilderness journeys and strong human dimensions should strive toward this goal long before the expedition embarks. Groups who do not place high value on interpersonal commitment risk a lower degree of safety, enjoyment, learning, and intra- and interpersonal growth from the trip than those who do.

While investigating expedition behaviour, we must first de-construct why the human aspect of trips is so critical in wilderness groups and seems to be more potent (in potentially both a positive and negative way) than in everyday life. Fundamentally, wilderness tripping is different from the lives we leave to enter wilderness: socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Firstly, during expeditions people live in close quarters 24 hours a day and generally lose their *taken for granted* opportunities for privacy. Secondly, stress levels are often higher as the risk level the group encounters is often heightened. This enhanced level of risk is positively correlated with the required level of interpersonal cooperation and trust needed for a successful expedition, where group members rely on each other significantly more for their immediate personal well-being than back at home. Lastly, options to check out from the group, sometimes even briefly, are greatly reduced and frequently impossible compared to everyday life. For these reasons, and others, the conduct of group members can have a profound and often immediate effect on others' emotions and well-being. Some group

members are expectant of and prepared for these physical, social, emotional, and spiritual changes from everyday life, but frequently many are not. However, the better informed and prepared group members are for dealing with these inevitable alterations, the greater the likelihood is for the group to realize a successful expedition.

The base or foundation of expeditions is the social atmosphere, for as a group travels through wilderness and partakes in new experiences, so too will it travel through the human dimension of the journey and learn and experience ideas and emotions through each other. An empowered social dimension will inevitably lead to an enriched physical, emotional, and spiritual journey. The quality of the journey's social dimension is pivotal upon a healthy attitude, for attitude is not only the control centre of the expedition, but of life as well. As the inevitable hardships of wilderness journeys challenge group members' attitudes, healthy attitudes focused upon the group's well-being will prove to be one of the group's most important assets.

In working toward strong interpersonal dynamics, it is important to be cognizant of some of the most common sources for conflict among people living in wilderness groups. These include: lack of respect, lack of flexibility, poor food, unbalanced chores, different objectives, different energy levels, different attitudes, stressors (such as bad weather), and an out-of-sync group member. It is important that all group members be aware of these potential pitfalls and collectively work to avoid them.

Prior to embarking upon expeditions, I believe that it is critical to nurture an open environment where people feel free to express themselves. Well before the trip, and preferably as the expedition team is assembled, participants must honestly share the personal objectives they hope to achieve during the trip. This time of sharing helps people to realign their objectives with that of the

group and for the group to align the group's objectives with that of the participants. In order to achieve this, group members must be flexible. Those who are unable to let go of personal objectives that are incongruent with the group's will at this point have to seriously consider their continued participation in the expedition.

Other group pre-trip activities include the sharing of people's fears and expectations and the sharing of how individual group members usually resolve interpersonal conflict. These discussions can stimulate groups to support others in their fears and lead to meaningful conversations as to how the group will deal with conflict that is bound to arise. Time spent discussing these issues prior to a wilderness journey may, in hindsight, prove to be a pivotal exercise in the success of the trip.

While the keys to successful expeditions are seemingly infinite, a brief outline follows with suggestions of how groups embarking on wilderness trips can foster strong group dynamics to enhance excellent expedition behaviour and ultimately more successful wilderness group experiences.

PRE-TRIP

Be clear about both personal and group objectives
Discuss concerns and expectations early on
Everyone needs to have input. *Decide how to decide* on group issues
Develop clear communications and be sure everyone is using the same terminology
Plan, plan, and more planning
Be organized and prepared

ROUTE

Select an appropriate route that is practical for group's time, objectives, and skill
Be realistic on what the group can handle
Build flexibility into the route

THE MEMBERS

Develop techniques to maintain compatibility, such as different partners for sleeping, cooking, and paddling
Rotate duties
Work toward individual strengths
Be aware of gender differences and guard against stereotypical roles
Take regular personal time
Share feelings
Be tactfully honest

STRESSORS

Will occur
Develop and practice coping techniques to use in stressful situations
Have a library on trip
Don't bite off more than you can chew
Ensure members are well fed, warm, and dry
Be aware of the barn door or mad-dash-out syndrome, especially after long trips. Members often choose to shorten the trip, skip some sights, travel longer each day, only to regret these actions after the trip.

TRIP BEHAVIOUR

At times, do 110% share of the work
Have a great sense of humor
Bring along a great attitude
Be respectful and polite
Provide positive feedback
Be prompt for group meetings (it's virtually impossible to be exactly on time, come early and enjoy the company of others)
Notify others when you are having difficulty
Remain flexible
Be cooperative
Accept that certain parts of an expedition are unpleasant and must be coped with
Provide reinforcement — say thank you
When in doubt use the *Mother Rule*; what would she do or say?

Members of successful expeditions must role model excellent behaviour, for a high level of expedition behaviour governs the soul of expeditions. And as a reminder, when the group wilderness journey draws to a close, don't forget to take a high level of expedition behaviour back with you to everyday life. Life is an expedition no matter where you are, and the human dimensions of life are indeed an intricate puzzle. Excellent behaviour in all of life's avenues will benefit not only yourself but all who share time with you. Good luck!

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